SONGS

I

Lord, where shall I find Thee?
High and hidden is Thy place!
And where shall I not find Thee?
The world is full of Thy glory!

Found in the innermost being,
He set up the ends of the earth:
The refuge of the near,
The trust for those far off.
Thou dwellest amid the Cherubim.
Thou abidest in the clouds,
Yet art raised above their praise.
The (celestial) sphere cannot contain Thee;
How then the chambers of a temple?

And though Thou be uplifted over them
Upon a throne high and exalted,
Yet art Thou near to them,
Of their very spirit and their flesh.
Their own mouth testifieth for them,
That thou alone art their creator.
Who shall not fear Thee,
Since the yoke of Thy kingdom is their yoke?
Or who shall not call to Thee
Since Thou givest them their food?

I have sought Thy nearness;
With all my heart have I called Thee;
And going out to meet Thee
I found Thee coming toward me.
Even as in the wonder of Thy might
In the sanctuary I have beheld Thee.
Who shall say he hath not seen Thee?—

Lo, the heavens and their hosts
Declare the fear of Thee
Though their voice be not heard.

Doth then, in very truth,
God dwell with man?
What can he think—every one that thinketh,
Whose foundation is in the dust?
Since Thou art holy, dwelling
Amid their praises and their glory,
Angels adore Thy wonder,
Standing in the everlasting height;
Over their heads is Thy throne,
And Thou upholdest them all!

II

To love of thee I drink my cup:
Peace to thee, peace, O Seventh Day!

Six days of work are like thy slaves.
While toiling through them, full of restlessness,
All of them seem to me but as a few days,
For the love I have to thee, O day of my delight!

I go forth on the first day to do my work,
To set in order the next Sabbath day's array;
For God hath placed the blessing there:
Thou alone art my portion for all my toil.

The lamp for my holy day is from the light of mine Holy One.
The sun and stars are jealous of my sun.
What care I for the second day or third:
Let the fourth day hide his lights.

I hear a herald of good tidings from the fifth day forth:
Tomorrow cometh fresh life for my soul!
The morning for my labour, the evening for my freedom:

I shall be summoned to the table of my King, my Shepherd.

I find upon the sixth day my soul rejoicing,
For there draweth nigh to me the time of rest.
Albeit I go about, a wanderer, to find relief,
At even I forget all my weariness and wandering.

How sweet to me the time between the lights
To see the face of Sabbath with mien renewed!
O come with apples, bring ye many raisin cakes—
This is the day of my rest, this my love, my friend.

I will sing to thee, O Sabbath, songs of love:
So it befitteth thee, for thou art a day of enjoyments,
A day of pleasures, yea, of banquets three,
Pleasure at my table, pleasure of my couch.

III

Thou hast bestowed great splendour on the Sabbath
Through the bond of peace and life.
And thou hast sanctified it, that it may distinguish
Between Israel and the other nations.

Who utter mere empty words
When they would compare their days with my holy day—
Edom later on the first day—and Arabia earlier on the sixth—
Can the deceit of Ishmael and Edom mislead the men of truth?
They compare dross with jewels,
The dead with the living.

And can there ever be for our neighbours, who think
To ascend the king's throne,
God's day of rest and man's,
Upon which God has set His blessing—
The first, the holy day of festival,
Which has endured since the beginning?
The tree of life springs forth from its sanctification.

In its shadow we live among the nations.
The host who rules as priest in Thy name
And who leans upon Thy name,
Behold—he mourns upon Thy bosom;
And rejoices at Thy table
He has refreshed himself with Manna (doubled on the Sabbath)
With yet a little flask-full left over.
This is known to the islands,
Celebrated among the nations.

Stretch forth Thy hand a second time
To renew Thine erstwhile kingdom
To Thy people wandering in the dark.
Dispersed to the left and to the right—
Then shame will befall Arabia and the Greeks.
Renew the priesthood of Aaron
That there may be sanctified in the camp of the Levites
Thy name, which is desecrated among the nations!

IV

Thy words are compounded of sweet-smelling myrrh
And gathered from the rock of mountains of spice,
And unto thee and the house of thy fathers belong precious virtues
Whereunto praises fail to attain.
Thou comest to meet me with sweet speeches,
But within them lie men in wait bearing swords—
Words wherein stinging bees lurk,
A honeycomb prickly with thorns.
If the peace of Jerusalem is not to be sought,
While yet with the blind and the halt she is filled,
For the sake of the House of our God let us seek
Her peace, or for the sake of friends and of brothers;
And if it be according to your words, see, there is sin
Upon all those who bend towards her and bow down.

And sin upon those sires who dwelt in her as strangers
And purchased their vaults for their dead,
And vain would be the deed of the fathers who were
embalmed
And their bodies sent to her earth—
And they sighing for her sake
Though the land was full of reprobates;
And for naught would the fathers' altars have been built,
And in vain their oblation offered there.
Is it well that the deed should be remembered,
And the Ark and the Tablets forgotten?
That we should seek out the place of the pit and the
worm,
And forsake the fount of life eternal?
Have we any heritage save the sanctuaries of God?
Then how should we forget His Holy Mount?
Have we either in the east or in the west
A place of hope wherein we may trust,
Except the land that is full of gates,
Toward which the gates of Heaven are open—
Like Mount Sinai and Carmel and Bethel,
And the houses of the prophets, the envoys
And the thrones of the priests of the Lord's throne,
And the thrones of the kings, the anointed?
Unto us, yea, and unto our children hath He assigned her;
And though wild beasts abide in her, and doleful creatures,
Was it not so she was given of old to the fathers—
All of her the heritage of thorns and thistles?
But they walked through the length and the breadth of her
As one walketh in an orchard among the green boughs,
Though they came as strangers and sojourners, seeking
But burial place and a lodging there, like wayfarers.
And there they walked before the Lord
And learnt the straight paths—
And they said that here arise the shades
And those who lie under the bars of earth come forth,
And that here the bodies rejoice,

And the souls return to their rest—
See now, yea see, my friend, and understand
And turn aside from the lure of thorns and snares,
And let not the wisdom of the Greeks beguile thee,
Which hath no fruit, but only flowers—
Or her fruit is: that the earth was never outstretched
Nor the tents of the sky spread out.
Nor was any beginning to all the work of creation
Nor will any end be to the renewal of the months.
Hark how the words of her wise are confused,
Built and plastered up on a vain unstable base;
And thou wilt come back with a heart stripped empty
And a mouth full of dross and weeds.
Wherefore, then, should I seek me out crooked ways
And forsake the mother of paths?

Notes to the Songs:

Song I

17—*Nearer than* their own spirit and their flesh
18—Their own mouth testifieth *with regard to them*
26f. *And when I went out to meet Thee*
I found Thee coming towards me.
28—'Even as'—not in the original text—
38—*But* Thou art holy . . .
40—Angels *proclaim* Thy wonder.

Song II

4—*While toiling through them*, I am full of restlessness
11—'*The light* of my holy day is from the light of my holy One.'
24—'To see the face of the Sabbath *as a new visitor*'
(A reference to the custom by which every day of the wedding week brings new visitors.)

Song IV

47—And they *say* . . .

COMMENTARY TO THE SONGS

Songs I, II and IV are reprinted from 'Selected Poems of Jehuda Halevi', translated into English by Nina Salaman, with permission of the copyright owners, The Jewish Publication Society of America. In passages where I disagree with the translator's rendering, I have added my version in the notes. Song No. III has been rendered into English by Hebe Mayer-Bentwich with reference to my German version.

Jehuda Halevi's religious lyrics obviously aim not only at satisfying æsthetic requirements like his secular poems, but, consciously or unconsciously, they serve a religious inspiration. In so far they support the arguments of the Kuzari. The relation between the two is illustrated in the Kuzari, Book V, § 16, where a comparison is drawn between the 'metric expert' and the poet, and between the inspirations emanating from either. Like the metric expert, the philosopher can appeal to any man of intellectual grasp; the poet, on the other hand, can only inspire the æsthetically gifted, for whom a slight hint is sufficient. The same applies to religious inspiration, which certainly does not emanate from the words alone, but also from the life of the devout man and, not least, from the direct expression of his experience in the religious lyric. In truth the same applies to the national sentiment, when it is expressed in the lyric; here also the words of the poet kindle sparks that inflame the heart of the reader.

Not all of Jehuda Halevi's poems can be taken as voicing his personal feeling. Very often there is an admixture of conventional expression of sentiment. But in some of his poems expression is given to thoughts of the Kuzari. They are a still purer and more impressive revelation of experience than the philosophic discourse. We have therefore appended a few of these and here add some short commentaries:

Song I

This poem, which is inserted in the passage of the morning prayers where the praise of God is proclaimed by the angels 'from His place', has as its theme an antinomy of religious consciousness. On the one hand, a religious man seeks God's traces 'in every place'; he considers it blasphemy when men attribute the wonders of organisms to nature instead of to God (Kuz., Book I, § 76). But, on the other hand, is it

not a degrading of God to 'find' Him, i.e. to claim perception of Him in any 'place' (Kuz., Book V, § 21), or to place Him in relation to this lowly mortal world (Book I, § 8, *cf.* line 18 ff. of our poem)?

Jehuda Halevi is not the first to stress this antinomy. His predecessor Bahya solves the problem by admitting that it is only God's traces that we perceive and not His being. Jehuda Halevi would not exactly have opposed this conception; for according to Kuzari, Book II, § 2, we come much nearer perceiving God's working than His qualities. In our poem the poet is not seeking a way out. He allows the tension to stand and overcomes it only by the idea, expressed in line 26 ff., that in searching for God we find God. Pascal's idea: 'tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne m'avais pas trouvé'.

Among the numerous parallels to this poem in European literature, the best known is the 'Confession' of the young Goethe in 'Faust': 'Wer darf ihn nennen und wer bekennen: ich glaub' ihn? Wer empfinden und sich unterwinden zu sagen: ich glaub' ihn nicht?' But Goethe calls God 'unsichtbar-sichtbar' in a sense different from Jehuda Halevi. He knows that the pantheistic feeling for nature, which penetrates him, is akin to the religious and yet remains a thing apart; it is no mere accident that the confession scene ends with the fall of the hero and the mocking laugh of the devil. Jehuda Halevi, on the other hand, 'possesses' God; and his doubt, as to whether he, an unworthy human being, may perceive God, emanates—from religion!

Song II

Jehuda Halevi is the first poet to sing of the Sabbath. Many before him had produced prayers for the Sabbath: he is the first to give expression in song to the *experience* of the Sabbath. The first words reveal the experience of that love and joy the religious significance of which is expressed in Kuzari, Book II, § 48. It is true that the Rabbis had preceded him in religious experience when they greeted the Sabbath with the exclamation: 'Come, O bride!' (Sabb. 119a), and as this exclamation inspired the best-known of all Sabbath lyrics, Heinrich Heine was not so wrong when he said that Jehuda Halevi had learnt from the Aggadah, and even when he confused him with Solomon Halevi, the author of the לכה דודי! But what in ancient times found its sole expression in symbolic acts finds poetic expression in the Middle Ages and in the Kabbalah through Bible reminiscence. As the years he served for Rachel seemed

unto the Patriarch Jacob but 'as so many days' for 'the love he bore her'—so for Jehuda Halevi (line 5) the weekdays are but swiftly passing forerunners of the 'beloved' day of cherishing (*cf.* Jer. xxxi, 19); the apparently worldly joys are only symptoms of this love: line 25 is reminiscent of the Song of Songs ii, 5, 'stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love'. But as God is the initiator of the fascination of the Sabbath (line 9, *cf.* Ex. xx, 11), the glory of this day is the irradiation of heavenly light—line 11. Heine is certainly wrong in assuming that Jehuda Halevi rejected the Halakah, i.e. the legal discussion. For the highly poetic conception of the Sabbath as the ruler of the weekdays—its slaves (line 3)—is taken from the legal provision that the weekday should be a preparation for the Sabbath (line 8), not the other way round; this appears even in the Talmudic discussion 'about the fatal egg which a hen had laid on the festival'. It was Jehuda Halevi's special merit that he gave voice to the inarticulate poetry of the Jewish law, thus converting it for us into a living experience.

Song III

In this poem, the belief in the peculiarity of the *Jewish* day of rest is still more strongly emphasized. The charm of this poem lies partly in the contrast—stressed by the rhyme—between חיים (= life or life's blessing) and גויים (nations, especially non-Jewish). The explanation of this contrast is found in Kuzari, Book II, § 32, where Israel, i.e. Israel's faith, is represented as 'living', the other faiths being but imitators of this life, just as the statue is but an imitation of the living organism. This, according to Kuzari, Book III, § 9, is particularly true of the Sabbath; the imitation of the other nations resembles the original only in the sense in which the statue resembles the human body. Hence our poem opens with the words: 'Thou hast honoured the Sabbath by the bond of peace and life and hast hallowed it that it may distinguish between Israel and the nations'. And if they quibblingly proclaim their 'days' the equal of my holy day—Edom advancing it to the first, and Arabia setting it back to the sixth—how can their hoax deceive the bearers of the truth? In the same way one might set rags on a par with jewels (עִדִּים לַעֲדָיִים) and the living on a par with the dead. Do our neighbours indeed find that 'rest of God and man'—that absolute

rest which, in the words of the King of the Khazars (Book III, § 10), raises the simple Jew above princes (*cf.* Heine), and saves the people from enslavement? Are their holy days days of remembrance of the rest-day of the creation (line 9) and, as such, the expression of our belief in the Creator? Do they call to mind the miracle of the manna, in which the non-Jews also believe (line 14 = Kuzari, Book I, §§ 4 and 9), as the basis of our trust in God's provision for the lower world? The comparison of man-made beliefs with the Divine appointment of the Sabbath must appear a blasphemy to Jehuda Halevi, debasing as it does the peculiar character of the Sabbath, which cannot be postponed or replaced at will.

Song IV

The belief in the pre-eminence of Palestine which Jehuda Halevi seeks to establish in Kuzari, Book II (§§ 13–24) finds expression in a number of his poems, of which the best known is the Zion Ode (translated by Nina Salaman, pp. 3 and 151). Although the poet speaks there in the name of the community (as 'the harp of its song'), his glorification of the land often bears his own stamp; the words 'how can other countries compare their vanities with your Urim and Tummim (which the High Priest wore)' are reminiscent of Song III with its message of the incomparableness of our religion; still closer in spirit is the thought 'that at that time it was not the sun nor the moon which gave light, but God's glory'. The phrase 'the air of Thy Land is the breath of life' is a reference to a Talmudic remark, but bears a special significance in the mouth of Jehuda Halevi, who believes in the superiority of Eretz Israel to all other countries; and the words 'I would take delight in thy stones and be tender to thy dust' attain their full significance through Jehuda Halevi's belief that only through such tenderness and love of the land can redemption be brought about (Kuzari, Book V, § 27).

The poem here quoted has a much more personal stamp. It contains the answer to the poem of a friend dissuading him from the journey to Palestine, seeing that only 'the blind and the lame', i.e. misbelievers, live there now, and that the land therefore has as little present significance as Greece, which also was once the cradle of culture.

After a few respectful words on the form of the poem, Jehuda Halevi's indignation at its contents bursts forth: 'for God's sake

and for the sake of our brothers' (line 11 ff.), for religious and national reasons, Eretz Israel has a unique value. At first he contents himself with indirect proof. Were it a country like any other, why did the patriarchs want to live, sacrifice and be buried only here (17 ff., *cf.* Gen. lvii, 29; l, 25), although even at that time unbelievers dwelt there (line 20 = Kuzari, Book II, § 23, end)? And they were right! For still higher than the veneration for the graves to which we pilgrimage must we reckon the reverence for the source of life (line 26) in which God has revealed Himself (Kuzari, l.c. 2nd phrase)! In addition to these religious considerations, we have national reasons: it has been promised to us and our children (lines 37 ff.) and, according to Gen. xiii, 14 ff., Abraham wandered around the Land (line 41) only because he considered it to be the inheritance of his descendants. And is it not the Land of marvellous hopes, even in the eyes of younger religions (lines 47 ff. = Kuzari, Book II, § 23, middle)?

On the other hand, Greece, like all other religions apart from the Jewish (Kuzari, Book IV, § 23), produced no 'fruit' or, what amounts to the same, only poisonous fruit (lines 54 ff.) such as the doctrine that the creation (מעשה בראשית) had no 'beginning' (ראשית) and no 'end' (אחרית), i.e. purpose (lines 57 ff.)! The worth of Greek profane science, which was appreciated by Jehuda Halevi as a disciple of Aristotle and the physicians, is not belittled by the statement that it cannot compare with the absolute worth of Palestine from both the religious and national aspects.